

## Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Project: Theatre Lounge, Chapter One, Holidaying at Home, Creative Ease, Boredom Buster

Organisation: Theatre Orchard

Region: South West England

### Introduction

It has been a privilege to be able to work with North Somerset communities over lockdown, and we have been bowled over by the honesty and bravery of the participants, many of whom face very challenging personal circumstances.

Different projects have unlocked different qualities. Drama and writing have allowed for reflection and self-expression, Holidaying at Home gave a license to step into a new reality and forget the physical surroundings, for a little



'I feel so valued and I want more people to experience this. We need resources, we have the family we just need a home to out us all in! I want Theatre Orchard to be a "forever". I want my grandbabies to experience what I have experienced because I know that they might need a safe space too.'

while, then perhaps return to them refreshed. Boredom Buster has united a community of artists - both local and international - in the shared aim of reaching out to isolated hospital patients, bringing a little creative diversion and entertainment during this disconcerting period when familial visits were not permitted.

All the projects have brought forth different perspectives on lockdown - the negatives and the positives, with a whole host of suggestions emerging from more marginalised

voices as to what learnings we can take forward, so that 'recovery' also incorporates 'transformation'. This verse from Theatre Lounge and Chapter One member Vickie Bardsley provides food for thought:

*The silence is deafening, the darkness is blinding,  
The scent of aloneness overwhelming. A new life  
For ten weeks so far for many, in trepidation of the living.  
Isn't it the dead we're meant to fear? Isolation is a haunting  
Made of nightmares, so few understand  
The daily hell I spent trapped in. Now we are the same,  
But once lockdown is ended, who will remember  
Those of us still forced into isolation?*

Image credit: Megan Clark-Bagnall for Theatre Orchard's Holidaying at Home programme

## **Funders**

Our Theatre Lounge and Chapter One provision are funded from our core Arts Council NPO funds, with a bit of help for specific projects from Quartet Community Foundation.

Holidaying at Home was funded by Without Walls.

Creative Ease is funded by a private donor.

Boredom Buster is funded through support in kind from Theatre Orchard and UHBW (staff time), contributing artists (time), with hard printing costs covered by the subscriptions from NPAG (National Performance Advisory Group for Arts, Heritage & Design in Hospitals).

## **Who is it for?**

1) Vulnerable adults in Weston's South Ward, presenting a range of physical and mental health needs.

2) Older members of the community

3) Families - from across North Somerset - including adults from South Ward

4) People who are still shielding as others move out of lockdown

5) Patients in hospital, unable to receive visitors

See "Further information" for more on how Theatre Orchard is reaching these groups

## **What outcomes were/are you aiming for?**

Combatting loneliness

Supporting positive mental health

Building new skills

Awakening new interests

Preventing boredom

Supporting positive family activity

Enabling routes for self-expression and peer support

## **Where is it happening?**

North Somerset

## **Are you working in partnership?**

We are partnering UHBW NHS Trust on Boredom Buster. The remaining projects are produced by Theatre Orchard but promoted in collaboration with a range of community stakeholders with whom we have built relationships over the past 13 years of working from the grass-roots in North Somerset. Includes: North Somerset Council, For All Healthy Living Centre, North Somerset Together (new 2k-strong volunteer body to support the shielding), social prescribing schemes, housing associations, Wellbeing Collective, Weston Artspace, North Somerset Arts, A+H SW.

## **How many people took/are taking part?**

Theatre Lounge - 8

Chapter One - 15

Holidaying at Home - 10 family groups

Creative Ease - 12

Boredom Buster - 20k orders

### **For how long has it been happening?**

Theatre Lounge and Chapter One are ongoing initiatives but were re-imagined for lockdown and will continue in digital form for the foreseeable future in order to safeguard the participants.

Holidaying at Home - April/May. This was originally a live arts project leading to our Whirligig Arts Festival in July

Creative Ease - new project to run through July

Boredom Buster - to be circulated first week of July. Potential to create Winter edition depending on feedback

### **What were/are the main outputs?**

Theatre Lounge - virtual festival (link above). Now they are working on devising a new play stemming from their experiences of lockdown to be shown through zoom.

Chapter One - we have had two lockdown 'speakeasy' zoom poetry events whereby members can share their reading to a wider audience. The Chapter One group were also invited to an evening of 'Poetry + Health', celebrating 'These are the Hands' (Poems from the Heart of the NHS) featuring one of their tutors as guest poet, alongside a range of medics/poets.

Connecting Chapter One to wider initiatives. We are looking to create a mini newspaper of the group's writing from the past year.

[Holidaying at Home - film](#) that has been circulated widely. The project has inspired a separate project that the practitioner is now running in Knowle Weston (Bristol) based around crazy golf.

Creative Ease - process led

Boredom Buster - physical 48pp document

### **Evaluation & feedback:**

We will be evaluating the range of lockdown activities, but are still immersed in their delivery. To come!

See [poem](#) and [case study](#) attached.

'Holidaying at Home' [film](#) includes some feedback at the end.

### **What have been the challenges and successes for you?**

We have had really great feedback. What has worked particularly well is maintaining in-depth communication with communities where we have pre-existing links and have established a sense of trust. Whilst we have created a range of resources for wider population (writing films, films about play, singing resources etc.

See <https://cultureweston.org.uk/at-home-with-culture/>

In a sense these become part of a sea of resources available online. The greatest impact is felt when there is more personal and meaningful delivery within small groups to people who really need it. This has involved some new contacts for us, but the majority are already known to our charity, and testify to the need for investment into ongoing community engagement work in order to build confidence and relations to a degree where they can still provide a life raft even when external factors really test.

## Further information

1) Vulnerable adults in Weston's South Ward, presenting a range of physical and mental health needs. This group usually attends Theatre Orchard's weekly open access Theatre Lounge session. During lockdown, we have shifted this to 2 x weekly sessions delivered by zoom, and have in addition set up a closed FB and What's App group to provide ongoing support. Members of the group have been focusing on the development of monologues recreating historic characters hailing from Worle, Weston's original settlement. They have undertaken every aspect from research to presentation (including costume making) which has provided an excellent focus point through this challenging time. The Worlite monologues were presented as part an online digital festival, thereby boosting awareness and sense of achievement.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/TheTheatreOrchard/559848831363724/>

The filming of the monologues was undertaken 'at a distance' and for one group member, it was the first time he had found the positive motivation to leave the house during lockdown (9 weeks in). Subsequently small sub-sections of the group are gathering together with the project leader, for fortnightly walk and talk sessions..... taking on board that fact that most do not otherwise take any fresh air.

Attached: [case study](#) feedback

- 2) Older members of the community through 'Chapter One' zoom creative writing sessions. Delivered fortnightly, each session explores a different style of writing - passages of text are explored together and small 'in-session' writing challenges are set, allowing work to be shared and discussed. Writing tasks are also set for completion between sessions, and participants receive one-to-one feedback from the two tutors on these separate tasks. This poem was created by group members - each contributing a verse - and includes entries that reflect on grief (one member was widowed during lockdown), and interestingly, what it is to be deemed 'vulnerable'. One member of the group who has a terminal illness strongly rejects the categorisation of vulnerability, and finds creative writing to be a positive and affirmative way of reclaiming identity and agency in what could be seen as a disempowering period.
- 3) Families - from across North Somerset - including adults from South Ward, and giving them the opportunities to work with their children in a positive context. 'Holidaying at Home' was a month long project which gave participants the opportunity to imagine their ideal scenario. At the end of the project, one participant wrote "I will always remember that a holiday doesn't have to be far away, it's what you make it.". Final video here <https://vimeo.com/419830162>, featured as part of the Arts & Health South West/Creativity & Wellbeing Week webinar 'Shining a Light on Creative Practices in the Time of Covid-19' to launch health & wellbeing week.
- 4) Creative Ease - this is a four-week pilot that we are about to launch led by drama/dance practitioners to bring some cultural uplift to those who are still shielding as others move out of lockdown. Running throughout July, for up to 12 participants.
- 5) *Boredom Buster* newspaper - this is a creative resource for patients in hospital, who aren't able to receive visitors nor support from hospital volunteers due to infection control

restrictions imposed through Covid-19. Produced by Culture Weston (an initiative run by Theatre Orchard that is place-specific) and University Hospitals Bristol & Weston NHS Foundation Trust, on behalf of the National Performance Advisory Group for Arts, design and Heritage in Hospitals. This creative activity resource, in the form of a 48-page tabloid newspaper, has already attracted orders of more than 20,000 copies from NHS Trusts all over the country from Taunton to York, and from Bath to Cambridge. The contents have been donated by hospitals arts programmers and individual artists of the stature of Jeremy Dellar, Anthony Gormley, Luke Jerram, Martin Parr and others 'who wish to remain anonymous'. Boredom Buster will bring Weston super Mare and the life-affirming spirit of the seaside into the minds of many people all over the country, and nicely demonstrates how arts and health can also cut across wider economic agenda such as placemaking.

*More information on Theatre Orchard*

Theatre Orchard's vision is 'Every Life in North Somerset Illuminated by Live Arts'. Our mission is to build and promote the value of culture as a dynamic, transformative force for community and economic regeneration in North Somerset, supporting pride of place and emotional and physical well-being. Working in partnership with communities, we draw upon creativity as the catalyst for positive social change; building the skills and confidence of people living in England's most deprived areas.

Two main activities underpin our work: Building opportunities for people of all ages to co-create sustainable multi-arts projects; Touring professional arts to the heart of communities; co-programming with community panels, opening hearts and minds.

Theatre Orchard is a charity employing 1 x full-time, 4 x part-time, plus sessional staff (5 regulars, and wider pool).